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March 24, 1879

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W. Hinton

VOICES OF THE DEAD

CHARLOTTE CORDAY AND MARAT

MAZZINI AND THE COUNTESS OSSOLI

DELESCLUZE ON THE BARRICADE

by ✓
J. P. Glavin

Mr. Harrin
1879.

[See Villiaumé's history for well-authenticated particulars concerning Marat and his assassination, which, if seen by Mr. Carlyle, might have corrected some errors in his most eloquent, but impassioned story of the French Revolution.]

CHARLOTTE CORDAY AND MARAT

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

'These are the Fields Elysian. Who is this,
The first to meet me? Lower than myself
In stature, and with countenance as harsh
And undelightful as the features were
Of Socrates!— And yet not without grace
Or dignity— repulsive though at first.
Is this the wretch I slew? Is this Marat?
Smiling he meets me, with his hand held out
—To me his murderer: can I turn aside?
He draws me tow'rd him with that potent smile.
Does he not know me— Charlotte Corday?

MARAT

Yes!

I know thee, Charlotte! though to thee unknown
As yet, for all my outward lineaments
Recall thy crime.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

By heaven, it was no crime:
I slew the foe of France.

MARAT

For Barbaroux !

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

Thou sayest truth. And Danton was my mark.
Aiming at him, my hand was turn'd to thee,
Proscriber too of the Girondins : my deed
But half premeditated, not less good.
I hated tyrants.

MARAT

We were one in this.

And that I hated tyrants was enough
To point the tyrant-hater's steel against
My heart.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

And hadst thou then a heart ? Marat !

MARAT

Methinks that thou hast not to question me.

"I am unfortunate ; and so to be

"Gives me a right to your protecting care ?"

These were thy words.— Well mayest thou hang
thy head.

As Cain Marat was cursed, for his great sin,—
He loved the Poor. None ever call'd him false.
One woman only to thy level stept :
The Wife of Heber, heedless of the dues
Of sacred hospitality. To her
Her enemy came.— And was it really France
Required thy patriot dagger ? Answer me !

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

I will speak truth. I did love France indeed,—
Next to my lover. And I loved my king,
And hated the republic. It is true
I first sought Danton ; but they gave me hope
That daring soul might be less firm of will
Than thou or Robespierre, and haply won
To place the Dauphin on his father's throne.
And so I broke the cursed Triumvirate,
I cared not how. But why should I confess
To this my enemy ?

MARAT

Here is the truth.

No falsehood or equivocation serves
Beyond the tomb.— Thou weepest ; and I see
Already thou repentest of the deed
That erewhile seem'd so glorious.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

Can it be

That I have wrong'd thee? Surely it was right
To stay the murderous course of cruelty?
That thou wast cruel, wilt deny? Marat!

MARAT

Cruel against the cruel ! Sayest thou ?
And against whom did I provoke, not haste
Of savage hate, but justice swiftly sure ?
Ask of our France, of France the prey of kings,
Poor France the victim of the aristocrat !

Ask of the People ! Could I be their friend,
And not be cruel—if I dared be just ?
Ask of the ages of their agony,
Whose term I would have hasten'd ! Ask not me,
Defenceless : for I cared not even to beg
The tardy reparation which sometimes
May wreath a felon's grave.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

Thou hadst not need.

Even from the scaffold I could see the crowd
Of mourners at thy funeral. Indeed
The tears of all the poor fell on thy grave,
There in that garden—the Cordeliers',
Where thou wast laid in honour, the while I
Was lifted above execrations.

MARAT

That is nought.

Fickle the popular breath ! To-morrow Fame
Will bid historians write of Charlotte's worth
And brand the squalid "horse-leech." Let it be !
But here, where Fame sends not her lying breath,
(Out-blown by Death, more tuneful trumpeter),
We better know. And thou and I in face
Have truer vision.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

I repent, Marat !

A woman's heart may lead her judgment wrong.
I did mistake. Yet was my meaning right.

MARAT

If our intents excuse us— Knewest thou mine?
May not Marat put in as safe a plea?

CHARLOTTE CORDAY

And Barbaroux?

MARAT

And more of the Gironde.

Say all! Poor combatants, in mid of dark
Slaughtering each other, which shall be absolved?
Nor thou nor I perhaps by common minds.
And yet the horse-leech and his murderer——
Enough! such word may no more pass my lips.
All but thy treachery shall be forgiven;
I have forgotten that. Now take my hand!

MAZZINI AND THE COUNTESS OSSOLI

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Your leave, Mazzini! but indeed you are wrong
So to expose yourself. Think of your friends!

MAZZINI

I have no thought to-day except of Rome.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

But for Rome's sake,— the duty we all owe

6 *MAZZINI & THE COUNTESS OSSOLI*

Even to the Cause, though everything be lost.

MAZZINI

I watch the embers of our Roman hope :
If Rome endure the Gaul with dignity,
And yield as nobly as 'twas bravely fought.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

I pray you, care to save yourself. Your life
Must yet be serviceable.

MAZZINI

Trust in God —

And in his justice, that it shall be so !
Yet would the Senate had acclaim'd my words ;
Or we withstood the foe from street to street,
From house to house, though to succumb at last.
There would be time to rear a monument
Of Roman Ruin,— so their Victory
Might shrink aghast and trembling slay itself.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Against such force ?

MAZZINI

They would not dare the throe
Of dying Rome ; but watch us from their heights,
And hire Starvation to complete their task.
But what I ask'd the Assembly was to leave
The walls of Rome and carry Rome itself —
The Roman life — the valour which is Rome —
Wherever we might find a place to stand
For briefest breathing-time beyond the line

Of Gallic insolence. One swift defeat
Of Austria had raised the Romagnese :
There had been the Republic. And for France,
She should have occupied, not conquer'd Rome.
But the Assembly would not : could not see
That Rome is Italy. And now —

COUNTESS OSSOLI

The French !

They clear the street. The people move away
Reluctantly, and murmuring, with bent brows,
And looks as they would stab the intruders.

MAZZINI

So !

And yet they say I only held my power
By terror.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

All in Rome know that is false.

MAZZINI

A priestly lie, to make excuse for France !
No sentinel stood guard before our door ;
Nor did we doom a single foe to death.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

You did not seem to expect French enmity.

MAZZINI

My hope forbade to question ; nor withdrew
(For trust preventeth treason — I have found,)
Until the liar Oudinot broke truce.
Fit tool for presidential perfidy !

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Yet now, their baseness manifest, you place
Your life at the mercy of a villain's shot.

MAZZINI

Even Napoleon's sbirri would not dare
Assassinate me in the streets of Rome.
A prisoner, I would only be in the way.
Fear not for me ! I am as safe as when
We stood together, where I met you first,
In that small school, among our organ-boys.
Poor old Pistrucci !

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Well I mind that night.
Your English friends, how they will grieve at this.
As we Americans shall also.

MAZZINI

Grieve !

Ay ! there is room for grief, even for yourselves :
Most for yourselves who left us all unhelp'd.
One earnest word from your America
(Since England under atheist bonds of Trade,
Manhood forgotten, might not intervene),
Or, words without effect, one ship of war
Cruising before Marseilles, we had been free.
Our hands were strong enough for Austria ;
And Naples crouch'd already at our feet.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Would God it had been ! But our fathers taught

To avoid all interference and all part
In Europe's quarrels. Surely it was wise ;
And time has well approved their policy.

MAZZINI

Not wise, not right, my friend ! to stand aside
When struggling Right requires our dutious strength.¹
I know how your traditions hamper you.
And that alliance between South and North,
Slave-owner and New Puritan, may be
Entanglement enough. It will break up
Your empire — Yes ! I said. I can not say
Republic. No res-publica with slaves,
And life unregulated, flung to chance,—
Duty a word unknown, your days divorced
From God's great work, his will not track'd by you.
A crowd of pedlars (say you call'd none slaves),
Gamblers and thieves,— these do not constitute
A Commonwealth. A caravanserai
Is not republican. I had not framed
Our Roman State on such an archetype ;
Nor, as in England, made mere trade the aim
And end of our Italian Liberty.
Forgive my bitter words ! My heart is sore.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

Mine too, Mazzini ! Do I not feel for you ?
It is so hard, shipwreck'd in sight of port.
But yet the very record of defeat
Shows written underneath the certain pledge

10 *MAZZINI & THE COUNTESS OSSOLI*

Of future triumph. All that has been done
In these proud days, by you and by your Rome,
Is done — the seed of a great harvest-time,
Sown in God's Field. He hath the care of it.

MAZZINI

I know it. I am sure that Rome again
Shall give a new religion to the world —
(It is my faith — Despair itself respects) :
The new religion of a life, not left
To priestly ordering of time and place
For intermittent worship of the Truth,
But organized so that the lowest man
Is priest, and an unceasing worshiper,
Secking the meaning of Eternal Law
And with endeavour dutiful the same
In every place and season to fulfil.
The hour shall come ; and, from the Capitol
Proclaim'd, the world shall hear the Word and live.
Nor nations thenceforth dare to crush the growth
Of equal nations or to disallow
The holy bond of human brotherhood.
France overthrows not God's Futurity.
Rome moveth yet. Farewell ! I must go forth.

COUNTESS OSSOLI

God be with you ! dear friend ! And yet again
I do intreat some caution for yourself.

MAZZINI

Be you assured ! My work doth not yet end.

COUNTESS OSSOLI (*alone*)

His hand has almost scorch'd mine, though the snow
(The wintry thought of these last anxious days)
Lies on his head. I have seen *Ætna's* top
So streak'd with grey. I pray God keep him safe.

DELESCLUZE ON THE BARRICADE

Mazzini! thou wast right. Far-sighted friend!
Thy judgment was correct. The dead are dead:
Their ghosts are powerless. Perhaps my heart
Presaged as much. But for our France, alas!
What else remain'd for patriot zeal to attempt?
Our ancient commune—franchise of old Gaul,—
Was it for that I cared? But if as means
Of present safety—ground whereon to build?
What could we do with France demoralized,
Imperialized, degenerate, without faith
Or energy; hedged in with German steel,
And at our heart division? What was left,
What else as Frenchmen, for the few to do?
France fallen, Paris saved: why, we had saved
All France. Freed Paris lifts the whole.
And was not this, my friend! your thought at Rome?

We were heroic too as even the best
Of your best Romans — and the end the same.

Why do my thoughts recall that time of shame—
When Baudin fail'd and none would hear Ledru ?
O France ! that knell was prelude unto ours.
The assassin who stabb'd Rome is hidden here :
Napoleon yet more vilely mask'd as Thiers.
So ever on the trail of Public Wrong,
Howe'er successful, the Avenger treads :
Sure overtaker, certain of his due.

What else had we to do ? It was our work,
The suffrage,— thine, Ledru ! how could'st thou see
Its sad misuse and live ? It was our pledge
Of faith, from man to man. We had some right
To trust, who trusted so. We hark not back
For all misusing, nor repent our course
For disappointment : but to only know
Our bright, intelligent Paris, brave and true,
Out-voted by these peasants drill'd and driven
By priests that dog-like lick'd Napoleon's sores ;
To bow, and not to mere dull Ignorance
That might be led into the clearer light,
But brutal Ignorance goaded on by Lies ;
To give up the Republic to the Priest,
And make of human right a stepping-stone
O'er which new Tyranny might climb to power

In virtue of the popular will — so said :—
Better heroic daring and all lost ;
And one endeavour at redress our grave.

Well ! “ Communists ! ” We have not coveted
The style of Christian ; but the names, meseems,
Are synonyms. It is a strange reproach
Flung out by those who call them by his name,
And boast adherence to the doctrines taught
By the Great Communist from whom they date
The world’s redemption. Yet not very strange.
Not only that of his tenets now denied.

Misunderstood — as we are. Did we preach,
Like Christ, community of goods ? We strove,
As in old Gaul, to establish in the land
Some cities of refuge. Nay ! a single one,
Wherein self-government might grow to fruit.
We did not seek to graft our special kind
Upon the Liberty Tree we dared to plant
In the waste garden of the Tuilleries.
I ask myself again, — What else to do
Amidst the rubbish of that ruin’d throne ?
Some old republicans still living ; else
A generation hopeless and effete.
'Twas a last effort. It is time to die.
Nothing of what is past returns again.

Could we recall the past ! To summon back
The days that follow'd February : days
When we had power, and will, but were so young
In policy ; to undo all that June
Of fiery terror, and the after June
Repeating— when Rome felt the secret knife
Of our forgiven president. Again
My thoughts return to Baudin. I would share
His fate,— all lost beside. Death seemeth slow
When waited for. Alas ! unhappy France ——

[*A shot strikes him down.*] ——

I also, France ! have well deserved of thee.

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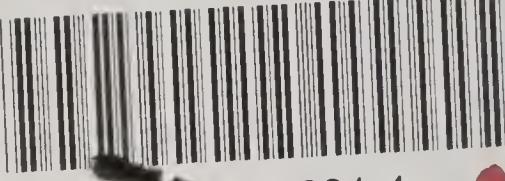


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